

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08
FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 SP-02 STR-05 TRSE-00 LAB-04
SIL-01 OMB-01 /050 W
-----043060 030638Z /14

R 021839Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0930
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USNATO
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY

USOECD ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, PINT, UK, EEC
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT TO AMEND EC DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL

REF: LONDON 19166

SUMMARY - RESPONDING TO GROWING PARLIAMENTARY SENTI-
MENT, THE GOVERNMENT DECEMBER 1 PROMISED TO AMEND THE
EC DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL TO MAKE BRITISH ACCEPTANCE
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OF ANY EXTENSION OF EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY POWERS CONTINGENT
ON SPECIFIC ACT OF PARLIAMENT. WHILE THIS INITIATIVE
WAS WELCOMED BY ALL SIDES IN COMMONS -- INCLUDING THE
CONSERVATIVE FRONTBENCH -- IT ALSO FULFILLS ONE OF THE
PRECONDITIONS FOR LABOR PARTY PARTICIPATION IN THE
DIRECT ELECTIONS. THE GOVERNMENT'S SKILLFUL HANDLING
OF THIS POLITICALLY SENSITIVE ISSUE WAS NOTEWORTHY.

END SUMMARY.

1. THE FIRST DAY OF COMMITTEE DEBATE ON THE DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL, DECEMBER 1, WAS MARKED BY DEMANDS FROM ALL SIDES IN COMMONS FOR A LEGISLATIVE BAR TO INCREASING EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY POWERS WITHOUT PRIOR CONSENT OF PARLIAMENT. LABOR ANTI-MARKETEERS ARTICULATED THIS DEMAND EARLIER (REFTEL) AND THEIR POSITION WAS ECHOED BY DEPUTY CONSERVATIVE LEADER WHITELAW DURING THE SECOND READING DEBATE LAST WEEK AND IN COMMITTEE BY CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN DAVID HOWELL. TO THIS END, ANTI-EC LABOR MP DOUGLAS JAY INTRODUCED AN AMENDMENT DECEMBER 1 WHICH WOULD NULLIFY THE LAW ON DIRECT ELECTIONS, THUS REMOVING THE STATUTORY BASIS FOR BRITISH PARTICIPATION, IF AT ANY TIME ASSEMBLY POWERS WERE INCREASED, REGARDLESS OF HOW THE INCREASE CAME ABOUT. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT JAY'S PROPOSAL WAS A WRECKING AMENDMENT AND ACCEPTABLE TO NEITHER THE TORIES NOR THE GOVERNMENT. BUT IT FORCED THE ISSUE.

2. CLOSING THE DEBATE ON JAY'S AMENDMENT, FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN STATED THE GOVERNMENT'S OPPOSITION, BUT PROMISED THE GOVERNMENT WOULD INTRODUCE ITS OWN AMENDMENT TO PROHIBIT A BRITISH GOVERNMENT FROM ACCEPTING "ANY EXTENSION OF THE POWERS OF THE ASSEMBLY WHICH WOULD ENCROACH ON THE POWERS OF WESTMINSTER (PARLIAMENT)

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WITHOUT A SPECIFIC ACT OF PARLIAMENT AND WOULD NOT ALLOW IT (AN INCREASE IN EC ASSEMBLY POWERS) TO BE DONE BY AN AFFIRMATION UNDER THE EC ACT". THE JAY AMENDMENT WAS THEN PUT TO A VOTE AND LOST BY 122 TO 49.

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3. COMMENT: OWEN'S STATEMENT WAS WELL-RECEIVED ON ALL SIDES OF THE HOUSE, AND THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT SEEMED TO MEET THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY THE CONSERVATIVE FRONT-BENCH. THERE IS, ACCORDINGLY, LITTLE DOUBT THAT IT WILL BE OVERWHELMINGLY ENDORSED BY COMMONS. IT IS WORTHY OF NOTE THAT THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT WILL AND, IN OUR VIEW, THE MOST DIFFICULT -- OF THE PRE-CONDITIONS ESTABLISHED BY THE LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE FOR OFFICIAL PARTY PARTICIPATION IN DIRECT ELECTIONS. THE OTHER CONDITIONS WERE THAT: THE GOVERNMENT COMMIT ITSELF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO WORK FOR REFORM OF THE EC FROM WITHIN, WHICH WAS APPARENTLY FULFILLED BY THE CALLAGHAN/HAYWARD LETTER OF OCTOBER; THE FIRST-PAST-THE-POST ELECTORAL SYSTEM BE USED, WHICH WILL BE MET IF, AS EXPECTED, COMMONS REJECTS PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION; AND THAT LABOR CANDIDATES BE SELECTED THROUGH THE NORMAL CONSTITUENCY MACHINERY, WHICH CAN BE HANDLED BY INTERNAL RULES OF THE PARTY. AS A RESULT, LABOR'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTION IS NOW ALMOST ASSURED.

4. IN OUR JUDGMENT, THE GOVERNMENT HANDLED THIS ISSUE COOLLY AND ADROITLY. RATHER THAN INTRODUCE ON ITS OWN AN AMENDMENT SUCH AS THAT PROPOSED TO APPEASE ITS ANTI-EC WING, AND GIVE THE CONSERVATIVES (AND BRITAIN'S EC PARTNERS) FURTHER GROUNDS TO QUESTION ITS COMMITMENT

TO THE EC AND DIRECT ELECTIONS, IT WAITED FOR THE DEBATE
IN THE EXPECTATION THAT TORY BACKBENCH SENTIMENT WOULD
FORCE THE FRONTBENCH TO RAISE THE ISSUE. WHEN, AS
ANTICIPATED, THIS OCCURRED, THE GOVERNMENT GRACEFULLY
ACCEDED TO THE WILL OF THE HOUSE, APPEASED ITS ANTI-
MARKETEERS AND FULFILLED ONE OF THE CONFERENCE PRECONDI-
TIONS FOR PARTICIPATION. IT WAS A PERFORMANCE WORTHY OF
HAROLD WILSON, WHO LIKED NOTHING BETTER THAN TO BE CAR-
RIED TO HIS GOAL ON THE BACKS OF HIS ENEMIES.

BREWSTER

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